

adapted to their own phenomenal growth since World War II. Senior managers have kept budget authority and control centralized at the executive level, while an expanding and diversifying stable of semi-autonomous divisions have had to compete with each other for scarce corporate resources, such as R & D and marketing support. This has blurred lines of responsibility and accountability, slowed decision-making to a crawl and forced middle-managers to spend more and more time writing reports and battling for turf rather than concentrating on concrete business tasks. CEO's, in turn, tend to exhaust themselves "keeping the peace" among competing divisions, with little energy left over for the more important work of analyzing markets and planning strategy.

If they want to survive and prosper, large corporations must revamp, among other things, their performance-appraisal and compensation systems to reward managers for productive endeavor rather than infighting and paper-shuffling.

The book's message is not as strong as it might have been because the authors offer little evidence and few illustrations to support it—you either buy it or you don't. (Vojta, a career executive at some of the nation's largest banks, also chose not to relate any of his doubtlessly impressive first-hand experience.) One assertion that's hard to buy is what might be called the yuppie's revenge: corporations are "at risk" partly because young, well-educated middle-managers are dissatisfied with corporate life, want "meaningful" careers, and are less willing than their apparatchik elders to "claw and fight their way up the corporate hierarchy." In fact, yuppies seem eager enough to claw and fight their way into other rigid, generally meaningless careers, such as corporate law, as long as they're promised prestige and high salaries. The older generation, on the other hand—and the authors admit this—got on board the management escalator during the 50s and 60s, the "Golden Age" of corporate

expansion. Corporate bureaucracy was less extensive, and promotions, raises, power and prestige came more quickly and predictably. Transport today's disgruntled corporate yuppie back 25 years, and he'd be happy as a clam.

—Paul Glastris

Funny Money. Mark Singer. *Knopf, \$15.95.* Mark Singer's story of the rise and collapse of the Penn Square Bank is at once witty, meticulously reported, and a hell of a story. Singer, a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, found what a journalist dreams of: a controllable subject sitting in the middle of a far-reaching conflict, a small bank that operated during the oil boom as a middle man between the speculators in Oklahoma and major banks all over the country. Singer has also found himself a cast of characters worthy of a great movie comedy: bank executives, such as Bill "Beep" Jennings and Bill "Monkeybrains" Patterson, and borrowers who are as eccentric as J.R. Ewing and twice as foolish.

Singer's prose is direct, clear, and at times, wild. Unlike so much business reporting—there has been an explosion in that area lately—Singer has a knack for tying the facts of the case to a sense of their importance. Here is Singer generously providing what old newspaper folk refer to as "the big picture graph":

"Bad fantasies loomed within easy traveling distance. What if first the Penn Square Bank folded, followed closely by the largest banks in the Pacific Northwest and the Midwest, and what if those failures were followed by the failures of the industrial economies of, say, Mexico and Argentina? What if Western capitalism took a dive? What if global economic apocalypse started in an air-conditioned mall in Oklahoma City—out there in the company of the Stout Shoppe and the Peanut Shack and the video arcade and the gift store where for \$12.95 you got a room freshener disguised as a porcelain duck?"

Singer grew up outside of Tulsa, and he evokes the particulars of the

place through legwork, memory, and a talent for knowing what to include and what to throw away. There is no fat in his prose:

"In the Oklahoma suburbs, where there are two taco joints for every tree, you see wellheads surrounded by high fences in undeveloped residential zones, you see pumping units in strip-shopping-center parking lots. Four-story derricks straddle the wells on the grounds of the state capitol and the governor's mansion, and it matters very little that so many wells are barely oozing crude—that the derricks' main function is to provide a remembrance of things past. Appearances count. Mythology counts."

—David Remnick

Mailer: His Life and Times. Peter Manso. *Simon and Schuster, \$19.95.* Did you hear about the time when Norman tipped over the...? Is Norman's bigger than...? Anecdote and reputation: that is the stuff, the stuffing really, of Peter Manso's relentless compilation of 150 interviews on the subject of Norman Mailer.

It's almost as if Mailer has deliberately created himself to be the source not only of shimmering autobiographical work, as in *Armies of the Night* and *Advertisements for Myself*, but also of biography. His life is as evocative and evolving as an endless Oriental scroll painting: early fame, early despair, political and public excursions, triumph and error. Mailer's life calls out for a biographer of brilliance, one able to do a bit more than collect tape recordings.

Organized like George Plimpton's and Jean Stein's book on the femme fatale Warhol socialite, Edie Sedgwick, *Mailer* begins with little Norman in short pants and ends with him writing *Tough Guys Don't Dance* to pay the bills. The collage-interview form here is one of intellectual laziness and provides, at best, an archive for a future biography. One supposes that Manso would like to believe his book "evokes an era." It does not.

But it does provide in the end an

optimistic portrait of the present Mailer, a bold and singular writer ready to work to the end of his days. All the head-butting, establishment-baiting, dope smoking, marital battling, and honest literary toil ends in a Norman Mailer who is self-aware and generous, in his own words, "concerned with how many books I have left to write. It's no longer a question of is one the champ? I'm a writer like other writers, either better or less good than I think I am. But in the meantime I have a life to work at. And how do I want to lead that life in the time remaining to me? In other words, no more stunts."

—D. R.

Childrens' Hospital. Peggy Anderson. Harper and Row, \$18.95. This is an immensely moving true account of two months in the lives of six children in a hospital in Philadelphia. The story of one, Mark Price, a 15-year-old who died of cystic fibrosis toward the end of the second month, I found especially gripping from its tautly told beginning when he survives a dangerous emergency to his shatter-

ing death six weeks later.

Peggy Anderson has been my friend for 20 years. We worked together, first at the Peace Corps, then at *The Washington Monthly*, so I know some will think I'm prejudiced in her favor, which I am. But I can also assure you that aside from occasional flashes of sentimentality and a tendency to ignore the darker side of modern medicine, where greed, incompetence, and indifference do appear now and then, her book is a practically flawless read.

During the Peace Corps experience I shared with the author, I admired the nurses more than any other group of volunteers. *Childrens' Hospital* offers compelling evidence that they remain a clear cut above the rest of us.

—Charles Peters

The Righteous Cause: The Life of William Jennings Bryan. Richard Cherny. Little, Brown, \$15.95. Among some liberals there exists a sentiment that religious-minded individuals, particularly evangelical Protestants, are politically suspect and culturally unfit. The reaction to Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter

is a case in point. So, too, was the reaction to a deeply religious man of another era—William Jennings Bryan. When he died shortly after his appearance in the famed Scopes monkey trial, Bryan was remembered this way by H. L. Mencken: "[He] lived too long, and descended too deeply into the mud, to be taken seriously hereafter by fully literate men, even of the kind that write schoolbooks."

Mencken's wish seems to have been realized; who can remember the last time that Bryan's name was mentioned approvingly among liberal activists or at a Democratic convention? Perhaps it is because the Great Commoner stood in the face of modernity and claimed that evolution had no truck with right thinking. Or because he employed metaphors like "cross of gold." Or because he wore baggy pants and wide-brimmed hats and sweated profusely when Clarence Darrow grilled him during the Scopes trial.

What historian Richard Cherny brings to our attention, however, is that the Illinois native also possessed a passionate commitment to liberal values. Not only did he run for president *against* conservatives

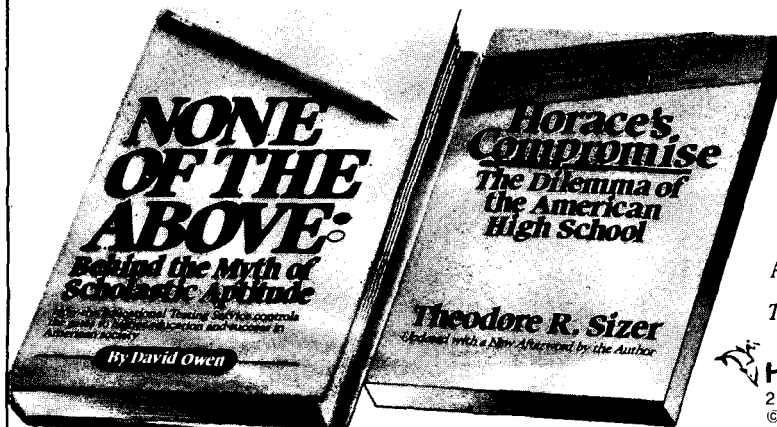
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